

**Letters to My Congressman, March – May, 2025**  
**By Bill Menke**

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed here are my own and are not endorsed by my employer or any other institution.

I wrote these fifty letters to Mike Lawler, the Republican Congressman from New York's 17th Congressional District in which I reside. That this number is so much greater than the handful that I have written legislators in the previous fifty years reflects my sense that America is at a critical cross-roads and that everyone ought to make known their opinions about what's happening. My choice of topics is partly driven by my assessment of those areas in which Mr. Lawler and I might share some common ground, so that my ideas are not dismissed out of hand. My writing has taken quite a bit of my time - well over an hour a day. I'm glad that I made the effort but am stopping now – at least for a while.

**50. Will the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation Save Gaza?** America is said to be backing the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a non-governmental organization that has superseded the UN in the distribution of food aid to the people of Gaza. I'm rather fuzzy on just what "backing" means, for little definitive information about the Foundation is available. For instance, the source of its funding is unclear, though most of the money is said to come from an undisclosed European government and not from America. The Foundation's involvement in Gaza comes at a very critical time, both because of the growing starvation in Gaza and the criticism from numerous governments, and especially Canada, France and the UK – and to some degree the United States, too – of Israel's conduct of its war against Hamas, which includes the blockade that has caused food supplies to dwindle. Sadly, the Foundation does not seem to be off to an auspicious start. Its Director resigned a few days ago, citing its inability to adhere to principles of "humanity", and, yesterday, its first aid delivery was marred by rioting among hungry people desperate for food. Simply put, the failure of the Foundation will lead to further starvation in Gaza and to deterioration in relations between Israel and its European allies - and maybe between Israel and the US, too. I urge your Foreign Affairs committee to look into just what "American backing" means. Was the extending of that backing due to an analysis that the Foundation has a reasonable chance of succeeding? If not, our Nation ought not be backing it. If so, then American backing needs to be more substantive than mere well-wishes. The truly horrific famine that is developing in Gaza must be averted.

**49. Federal Government Poised to Take on Another Trillion-Dollar Commitment.** As you know, the tax bill that recently passed the House and now is being considered by the Senate provides for a 100% tax credit for donations to Scholarship Granting Organizations, which in effect creates a Federal school voucher program for private and parochial K-12 education. Furthermore, the tax credit is structured in such a way that anyone who would otherwise be selling stock can escape paying capital gains taxes on it by making such a donation; meaning coming out ahead by donating. Scholarship Granting Organizations vary widely in mission, with some limited to specific religions or specific schools and other more general, so I'm sure that any given taxpayer will be able to find one that suits them well enough to enable them to make some money. Each year, Americans realize about three trillion dollars in capital gains and each year our Nation spends about one trillion dollars a year on K-12 education, so there would

seem to be enormous potential for “reprogramming” money that normally comes into the Federal treasury to school vouchers. But given America’s budget deficit, this really does not seem to be the best time for us to start what could easily grow into a trillion-dollar-per-year program. Now, I know that the current bill contains a couple of provisions intended to curtail its rapid growth – a five-billion-dollar annual cap and expiration after three years. But these things tend to take on a life of their own, especially should parents become irate that scholarships for their kids’ tuition have dried up and schools close due to falling revenues. Given the near-certainty that the House is going to have to continue to negotiate with the Senate over the tax bill, and that lowering the projected deficit seems to be high of the Senate’s agenda, I urge that two changes be made to the tax credit: closing the capital gains loophole, so that donors can’t come out ahead, and reducing the percentage to below 100%, so that making a donation costs them at least something.

**48. Our List of Allies Grows Thin.** As Elrond says in the movie version of Lord of the Rings, “Our list of allies grows thin”. However, unlike the Free Peoples of Middle Earth, our loss of allies has resulted from our own deliberate choices, and not from the machinations of an Enemy. Memorial Day is an especially good time to pause and take stock of our trajectory, as many of our alliances arose during the urgency of wartime, or afterward, out of ashes of defeated enemies, and are intimately connected to the service – and sacrifice – of American soldiers and sailors. Furthermore, the primary purpose of alliances is to provide for mutual defense and by so doing, ensure that the need for future American sacrifice is diminished. Our allies are not necessarily our “friends”, but any country who comes to think of itself as being threatened by us, as being attacked by us, or as being “next on our list” is unlikely to offer us full support in our time of need. Recently, we have enacted policies that our allies see as threatening, chief among which are our very-public coveting of their land or resources, and the enacting of tariffs so high as to shut down trade and cause them immediate economic hardship. I’m sure that you and the other members of your Foreign Affairs committee understand this. So I ask, what is the plan? Have we made a conscious decision that we no longer need allies? And if so, how do we plan to face our adversaries without them? Your Committee needs to satisfy itself that these questions have good answers, for they are urgent. Our list of allies grows thin.

**47. Advice in Face of the Ban on the C-C-Cussword.** We seem to be developing into a Nation where a whole lot of words are off the table and where keyword searches routinely boot grant applications and other government communications because they contain – sometimes just incidentally – one such word. Because the subject I discuss here is described by one of these off-the-table words, and because I don’t want my email to be booted by your automated software, I’ll call it the C-C-Cussword. In late February of this year, I rushed up to Harriman State Park to enjoy the snowfall, and had a great hike up to Stockbridge Shelter. It was the first day this past winter when enough snow had fallen to allow me to frolic in the powder. I parked at the lot at Silvermine Lake, which is very large because it once served the now-defunct Silvermine Ski Area. This ski area was very popular back in the 1930s and 40s, but closed in the late 80s due to lack of snow. These days, the mountain is lucky to get skiable snow for a week per year, if that. for The C-C-Cussword is responsible, of course. My assumption is that you’re not sold on the idea, but that you’re willing to consider the possibility that there’s something to

it, at least privately, especially as a couple hundred or so scientists from your District think it's a real phenomenon. So my intent here is to advise you about your quandary: how to deal with the effects of the C-C-Cussword on our District when it can't be talked about. And that's going to depend on which effects cause residents the biggest problem. We've had some hints that hurricanes, forest fires and severe thunderstorms are increasing in severity. That's true, but they are all fickle phenomena. A hurricane might hit New York, but then again, it might hit southern New Jersey, instead. The one disaster that will hit nearly everyone in our District is the rising cost of property insurance, or worse yet, policy cancellations, because they reflect C-C-Cussword related losses averaged all across America. In other words, the hurricane damages our District even when it hits south Jersey. And responding to rising insurance costs is something that Congress potentially could do, without ever invoking the C-C-Cussword.

**46. "Water Quality" is not a Cuss-Word.** A recently-leaked memo written by a Section Head at the US Department of Agriculture puts forward a long list of words forbidden in grant awards and other agreements, among which is the phrase "water quality". By excluding this phrase and other water-related words from the deliberative process, the USDA undermines its mission and does a disservice to the American people. I figure that the leadership of the USDA is targeting the phrase "water quality" because agricultural waste, when released into streams and rivers, does indeed reduce water quality, and in extreme cases, can even make the water toxic to human beings. Perhaps the leadership feels that it serves farmers better by actively ignoring or covering up this problem. If so, their approach is completely mistaken. Past research on water quality by agricultural scientists, including those employed at the USDA or receiving funding from it, have fostered many advances in farm pollution mitigation. These advances have allowed farms to operate more intensively and in closer proximity to people's homes. Our District has very few farms, so non-farm sources of pollution, including sewage, street runoff and industry have had the most effect on the water quality of our rivers and streams. Happily, we are a success story, both aesthetically and economically. Hudson River water quality has markedly improved over my lifetime, as industrial pollutants like PCBs were removed and sewage disposal was curtailed, and the economy of the towns along its bank have improved. We ought not to be trying to cover up water quality problems and we ought not allow the water quality in our District to diminish from some false sense of economy. History has shown that we have the technical know-how to improve water quality and that solving – not hiding - water quality problems is beneficial to the health and economy of the Hudson Valley.

**45. Doubtful Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory Can Survive the New Science Funding and Policy Changes.** As you know, our District is home to a top-rated earth science laboratory called the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory. It is world famous for the discoveries that its one hundred or so scientists have made in fields related to earthquakes, volcanos, mountain-building, ocean currents, El Nino, hurricanes, etc. In addition to bringing international acclaim, it benefits our district by providing high-quality scientific, technical and administrative jobs to six hundred or so people – meaning jobs with decent pay, pension and health benefits, and by purchasing services (e.g. catering, landscaping, construction) from hundreds more. The future of Lamont is in jeopardy due to changes in Federal funding and policy, including: the fifty

percent or so reduction in the proposed budgets of the science agencies (and especially the National Science Foundation), which Lamont relies upon for grant-funding; the reduction of the rigor by which science proposals are reviewed, through staffing cuts at the agencies and by reduced reliance on peer review, which directs funds to less deserving laboratories; the steep reduction of the indirect expense recovery rate, which once provided a mechanism for paying for the utilities used by laboratory buildings; and by the taxation of endowments. Although a robust institution like Lamont could probably survive any one of these four changes, the combination of all four is deadly. For instance, endowment income could possibly be redirected to supplement utilities – but not when it is being taxed. In another example, Lamont scientists ought to be able to continue to bring in grants by virtue of writing the most-brilliant grant proposals – but not when agencies pay less attention to quality when deciding upon who gets funded. Of course, Lamont is not alone in having an uncertain future; the same can be said of all the top science laboratories in our Nation. The question for Congress is whether America is going to decide to throw away its international advantage in scientific research, and the question for you is whether you will acquiesce to – or block - the destruction of our District's world-renown laboratory.

**44. Hudson Valley's Air Quality Worth Preserving.** I know that it's before your time, but back in the mid-1970s, the smog was so bad that I, standing on the overlook at Tallman Mountain State Park, could not see the buildings of Irvington on the opposite shore of the Hudson River. The dull brown-grey sky appeared to extend right down to river-level. That the views of the Hudson Valley, with its turquoise blue water and its emerald green woodland, are now terrific is wholly due to our success in cleaning up auto exhaust, industrial and power plant emissions and other sources of airborne chemicals and soot. Nor is the improvement merely aesthetic. The cleaner air has been better for everyone's health, and especially those with asthma and other lung conditions. So I shudder (cough?) when I hear that the Environmental Protection Agency is "relaxing" (or declining to enforce) regulations affect air quality, such as those limiting the ease by which gasoline evaporates. I urge Congress to ask hard question of the EPA leadership of just how much they are willing to let air quality slide. I urge you in particular to ask them for projections for our District. Listen to the people like me who lived through the terrible smog of the 1970s when we say America ought not to be inviting back that era!

**43. Taxing Endowments Disrespectful to Those Leaving a Legacy of Good.** A distant relative of mine (may he rest in peace) established an Economics Professorship at his Alma Mater. Being a banker, he was relatively well-off, but even so his entire estate, liquidated to form the endowment, did not generate enough income to cover a professor's salary. The college wound up holding off on the hire and reinvesting the income for about a decade before it grew to sufficient size. The delay caused considerable consternation amongst my relatives, some of whom themselves passed away before they could celebrate the hiring of the new economist. Nevertheless, a bright young Ph.D. was eventually hired into the position, and in the ensuing years, really added strength to the college's Business Major. But I fear for what will happen as the Federal government begins to grab part of the endowment's income; will the endowment still be enough both to pay the professor and to keep up with inflation? Or will it slowly be siphoned away by steep taxes? America has no business grabbing money intended to be a

person's legacy of doing good in the world! It is terribly disrespectful to those Americans who have had the public spirit to leave a lasting, good-doing gift to our society. Furthermore, it amounts to double-taxation. It effectively doubles the income tax that the professor pays to the Federal government – which is outrageous! Congress should not authorize the taxing of college endowments!

**42. Value of Continuing to Encourage Wind Power.** As Congress dismantles the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, you should consider attempting to retain the parts that encourage the development of wind energy. That's because it's a part of the Act that would likely have a long term benefit to our District, and the rest of New York State, too, for wind is the only locally-produced power source capable of meeting the needs of our expanding economy. We derive a great deal of our power from hydro and nuclear, but those are essentially fixed resources (except that we can buy expensive hydro from Canada if we're desperate). A lot of the rest is from natural gas turbines, and while we definitely could boost their power production, most of the money just heads out of state into the pockets of the folk in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Texas who own the gas wells. The same argument applies to coal, the production of which the President wants to see increased, but is less relevant, because we in New York have no coal-fired power plants. Right now, wind accounts for only five percent of our power, but has tremendous potential for growth. And being locally-produced, the erecting and maintenance of the windmills add to the local economy. Having reliable sources of power and a credible capacity to grow that supply in the future is vitally important to the long-term economic growth of our District.

**41. Medicaid Needed as Last Resort for Ailing Americans.** My mother (may she rest in peace) came within about a month of needing to go on Medicaid for memory care. As the homemaker wife of an MTA maintenance supervisor, she was well-off enough to have some savings and to own a modest Long Island house. My father, who passed away years earlier, thought of the house as her security, should her Social Security not prove to be enough during a crisis. And it did function that way; it was sold during her second year of memory care and used to pay the ongoing fee, with the rest of the family and me chipping in some, too. But the proceeds of the sale were dwindling after a couple of years. I was distraught, because her monthly fee was much more than my monthly salary. I worried about what would become of her, and was sad that her years of service to her community in her more able days counted for so little. Fortunately, there was Medicaid. I spent days filling out the application, which, with all the required financial disclosures, was literally three inches thick. But at least Medicaid was there and it gave me some hope that she wouldn't be turned out of her room. As it turned out, she passed before Medicaid paid any money on her behalf. But it really helped us nonetheless. I urge Congress not to gut the program. It offers people like my mother a last resort and some dignity in their time of need.

**40. Dismantling of US Geological Survey and University-based Earth Science Research Decreases Our Nation's Earthquake and Volcano Readiness.** The monitoring of earthquakes and volcanos provides vital information to emergency response personnel on the severity of these natural hazards and the risk to human lives and property. Earthquakes in California and

elsewhere in our Nation have caused widespread death and destruction, and even distant ones have spawn tsunamis that have led to coastal flooding. Similarly, erupting volcanos in Hawaii have burned whole towns and even remote eruptions (e.g. in Alaska and Iceland) have caused havoc to air traffic, endangering passengers and causing huge economic losses. The closing of the Alaska and Hawaii Volcano Observatories and the widespread lay-offs of USGS scientists make our Nation less prepared for the next Big One. Furthermore, the termination of grants to University-based scientists, including to those at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, here in our own District, slow the pace of prediction research and the training of the next generation of earthquake and volcano experts. I urge the Congress not to permit the dismantling of our Nation's capacity to respond to earthquakes and volcanic disasters.

**39. Foreign-Supplied Air Force One Endangers American Security.** The gifted 747 jet is troublesome from several perspectives, but the one I want to focus on here its planned use as Air Force One and its effect on our national security. Our President should not be flying on a jet provided by another country, even if it's one deemed friendly. Listening and locating devices, bombs and other remote controlled weaponry, and subtle construction flaws that could be exploited by an adversary, could all be present. Even if we were sure that the gifting country "wouldn't do that", we can't be sure that a third party didn't do exactly that, originally targeted at the leadership of the gifting country, but now redirecting their clandestine activities against us. A team of American security experts would have to take the 747 apart and X-ray every piece, and even then they still wouldn't be sure that they missed something clever. The only way this gift ever could be used as Air Force One would be for the President to ignore the advice of the experts and exempt it from review - but that would be an act of incredible naiveté. Furthermore, it would sow ideas in the minds of our adversaries that could cause further trouble down the line. I urge that your Foreign Affairs committee take a close look at how so-called gifts from foreign leaders may be endangering our Nation's security.

**38. US Geological Survey Provides Vital Flood Monitoring Services.** On the banks of the mighty Hudson River and the many smaller rivers and streams in our District are about twenty "gauging stations" operated by the US Geological Survey. All are capable of monitoring flow rate, which is vital for determining whether the stream is rising and a dangerous flood should be predicted. A few of the newer ones can also monitor oxygen and acidity, which is important to management of the fish populations. These stations, together with the Survey technicians that maintain them, the Survey software engineers who vet and archive the data, and the Survey scientists who make predictions and issue flood warnings, are providing a vital service to our District. One only has to reflect on the economic losses from the flooding in Piermont during Super-Storm Sandy, back in October '12, and in the Highlands from severe thunderstorms in July '23, and how much worse they might have been had less information been forthcoming, to become convinced of the practical value of this service to the people of our District. Yet the US Geological Survey is one of the several science agencies that are being dismantled, with several hydrographic offices already having been closed and its overall budget scheduled to be severely reduced. I urge Congress to ask hard questions of the Department of Interior leadership: Is there a plan to preserve the flood monitoring and prediction capability in our District and in America as a whole?

### **37. The SALT Deduction Cap Causes Our District to Pay an Unfair Share of the Nation's Taxes.**

When I moved from Oregon to a new job in our District (which was longer ago than I care to admit), I thought my new salary really was going to raise my standard of living, for it was thirty-percent more than my old one. I soon found out that I was mistaken, for so many things were so much more expensive in New York than in Oregon: the mortgage on my new house, tolls on the TZ bridge, heat and electricity – and property taxes. In fact, my standard of living was about the same, despite the raise. Had the SALT deduction cap existed then, my situation would have been much worse, my standard of living would have gone down significantly and my family's budget would have been really stressed. Youngish Rockland families today ought not have to skip the kid's lessons and summer vacations so that the folk in Oregon (and other lower-cost of living states) get a tax break. It's just not fair and it makes our District a less attractive place for families to want to live. I urge you as our Representative not to let other states take advantage of us.

**36. Supporting Research Includes Paying Lab's Electric Bills, Too.** Suppose that during the time that I volunteered as Church Treasurer, which was about a decade ago, the top donors met with me and said, "We don't want any more than twelve cents of each of our dollars going towards operating the Church building. It's too mundane an expense, we only want to fund exciting items like the preacher and the food pantry. You're going to have to find the money for heat, electricity, cleaning, maintenance, insurance and so forth from somewhere else – the endowment, maybe". I would immediately have realized that the Church was in serious trouble, for I knew that we actually spent thirty-five cents of every dollar on building expenses, and twelve of them went to insurance, alone. Furthermore, I knew that our endowment was earmarked for the Pastor's housing allowance and did not even fully cover that expense. I would implore the donors not to impose such a restriction, because if they did, the Church would have to close its doors within a few months. Furthermore, I knew from chatting with other treasurers in the area that almost none of their Churches could adapt to such a donor restriction, either. The same is true for scientific research laboratories, with respect to the announced decrease in allowable "Indirect Recovery Rates". The decrease, from a typical fifty-percent rate of last year, to a fifteen percent rate in 2025, is exactly equivalent to the Church donor's demand to drop from thirty-five to twelve cents out of every dollar. As with Churches, there are almost no research laboratories that can survive such a reduction, for they have no other source of funds to pay for electricity, heat, etc. So, the question that you folk in Congress need to be asking of the leadership of agencies like the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health is, Are they honestly mistaken in thinking that the reduction is somehow going to help scientists, or are they misrepresenting a conscious decision on their part to completely dismantle American science. Either way, I am imploring Congress, Do not permit the complete dismantling American science this reduction will cause.

**35. Improving the Way We Train Air Traffic Controllers.** We've all heard a lot in the news about the nationwide shortage of air traffic controllers, and those of us in the District who use Newark Airport recently felt the impact of that shortage. After hearing the situation explained by a spokesperson with the FAA, I can't say I'm optimistic that the problem is going to be solved

anytime soon. It's not because the training is very rigorous. Sure, it's rigorous, but we have lots of professions in America with rigorous training: brain surgeons, nuclear physicists, kung fu sifus, diplomatic translators, explosive ordinance disposal experts, and many, many more. It's that the training opportunities for air traffic controllers have not kept up with broad changes in American society, whereas for these other professions, it has. The maximum age to start training is set at thirty, even though young adults are graduating college later and later and kicking around longer and longer before deciding upon a career. And a longish stay of three-to-five months at the single FAA-run school in Oklahoma is required, even though Americans are having children later and later in life, and often in their late twenties, and having young kids make being away from home for so long out of the question. I imagine the factors put the occupation out of reach for the vast majority of young adults in our District. I urge Congress to ask some hard questions of the FAA. Do they have a viable plan for recruiting and training an adequate number of new air traffic controllers, or are the delays at Newark just going to get worse and worse?

**34. Dismantling the National Science Foundation Will Ruin American Science and Cost District Jobs.** Founded in 1950, the National Science Foundation has ushered in the era of American scientific prowess, in which American scientists dominate in almost every field, from Astronomy to Zoology, and in which American scientific know-how fed wave after wave of innovation that spurred the American economy to great heights. Over the years, the NSF leadership has pushed science forward by identifying and funding many new and fruitful areas of forefront research: quantum physics, artificial intelligence, plate tectonics, black holes, genetics, super-conductivity, weather prediction and so much more. Equally importantly, its funding of graduate students as research assistants has enabled the training of the next generation of scientists, including a large percentage who now work in American industry. Are we now going to throw away something so valuable and that actually works? Sadly, that does seem to be exactly the plan - to dismantle the NSF, laying off most of its scientist-managers, ending the development of new programs in forefront areas, and greatly reducing its ability to lead and fund American science. Looking at the trends, I would say that we are moving to an era of wishful-thinking as an alternative to science – an era in which news commentators and media personalities are substituted for people with real know-how. I urge Congress to consider whether America's continued economic success really can be based on wishful-thinking. I am convinced that if you get the science wrong, problems will grow, new products and even whole industries will fail and the American people will suffer.

**33. Energy Star Ratings Enable Families to Save Money.** I really don't want my electricity bill to eat any further into my family's budget, so I'm careful not to waste power. I use AC only sparingly in the summer and try not to do unnecessary loads of clothes or dishes. Although my frugality helps, what has really kept my costs from growing astronomically over the years is my careful attention to the energy efficiency of the appliances that I buy. Whenever one has to be replaced, I try to buy another that's more efficient than the last. The clothes washer that I bought last year is literally twice as efficient as the decades-old one that it replaced. It's really paid off for me. In the last couple of years, energy costs in our District are way up and I expect that they will soar even further. After all, our District is perpetually short on locally-generated



electricity and has to buy it from the Canadians, who keep raising their prices. The yellow-stickers with the Energy Star ratings that one sees in Walmart and Lowes are really the only viable way that appliances can be compared. You can't tell by just looking at the appliances, and the manufacturers don't usually provide any useful information about efficiency. So I was shocked to hear that the federal government is going to discontinue the Energy Star Ratings. I really rely upon them and so do a lot of my neighbors, many of whom have budgets as tight, or even tighter, than mine. It's said that the government is saving money by discontinuing the Energy Star office, but that really sounds penny-wise and pound foolish to me. I urge the Congress to ask hard questions of the Environmental Protection Agency, to see whether they're going to provide any sort of alternative. It would be a real shame to return to an era where you just can't tell how big a bite a new appliance is going to take out of your budget.

**32. Advanced Science Needed for the Golden Dome.** The President's budget is said to include twenty-five billion to jump start the Golden Dome, America's more expansive version of Israel's very effective missile defense. But that's only the first year; some budget analysts have speculated that the cost of the whole project will exceed one trillion dollars over the next decade. And, of course, once it's operational, it will require constant upgrades to keep up with developing offensive weaponry. With so much money being spent, I figure that a rather large cohort of engineers and scientists are going to be employed designing, implementing and updating the Golden Dome. Furthermore, they're going to need to be top engineers and top scientists, because nobody yet knows how to build a defense that works against intercontinental ballistic missiles. Figuring out how is going to take a lot of really creative R&D. Why then are we dismantling science and engineering at America's universities, the only institutions with the demonstrated ability to churn out really superb technical people? Isn't this exactly the time we ought to be building up our capacity to train more scientists and engineers? I urge Congress to ask some tough questions of the leadership of the National Science Foundation and the other agencies that fund university science departments, and who have recently announced big cuts. Do they have a plan that will ensure an adequate pool of technically-trained workers? Or will the Golden Dome fail on account of a shortage of top talent, and in the process waste a huge chunk of taxpayer money?

**31. America needs the Expertise of its Scientists.** As you know, the President just got snookered by a PhotoShopped image of a tattoo that he pulled off the web. I'm not surprised; I've gotten duped by bogus social media pictures, myself. But there's one important difference between him and me: he's the President and he unknowingly showed an altered image to the American People; and I'm just some dude in Rockland Country who unknowingly showed one to my wife. I know enough about images to be certain that a computer scientist could have determined that either of the images was altered – in five minutes or less. In addition to the incident showing the value of routine procedures for vetting materials before going live on TV with them, it emphasizes the importance of scientific expertise. The world is full of groups trying to do us wrong through technical means: cyber-criminals trying to steal money; kooks trying to get us to endanger our health by buying snake oil; foreign governments trying to eavesdrop on military communications; terrorists trying to develop nuclear or biological weapons; and so much more. In some instances, the issues are clear-cut, but sufficiently

technical that most ordinary people (and even Presidents) would not be able to distinguish fact from wishful thinking. Acceptable arsenic levels in drinking water would be an example. In other cases, the con is so sophisticated that only top experts trained in state-of-the-art science even can detect it. The billion-dollar ByBit heist is an example. The American People deserve the best advice on the technical issues that affect their lives. America's top scientists need to be part of the system that that develops American policy and offers Americans advice.

**30. Shutting Down American Science Counterproductive.** America's leadership is in the process of shutting down American science, within both universities and government. This destruction seems incredibly counterproductive to me, for scientific innovation has been one of the main drivers of our economy. America's scientific prowess is the envy of the world. Science is one of the things that our Nation does incredibly well. So many inventions that improve our lives have arisen out of government support of science, in so many different areas, including: miracle drugs to cure disease; tools to predict of hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanoes, tsunamis to save lives from these and other natural disasters; new types of super-fast computers and data-transmission that enable better and more secure communications; and so forth. Furthermore, all sorts of companies depend on the industrial-scientists, technicians and engineers who have been trained by top university scientists and who started their careers in government laboratories. What I find especially disturbing is the complete lack of thought that has gone into the shutdown. Scientific projects have been cancelled just because their project description contain a word, like "trauma" or "bias", that is seen (incorrectly) as having political overtones. Scientific databases hosted by government laboratories and relied upon by scientists have been made unavailable or even deleted. Travel and fellowships that allow American scientists to keep up with advances made by scientists in other countries have been disallowed or cancelled. Funding agencies have implemented "impossible" rule changes (like the big reduction of coverage of laboratory heating, electric and data-network bills) without any analysis of the feasibility of the laboratories being able to adapt. These actions are shutting down American science, including laboratories in our own District of which many of us residents are rightfully proud. You ought not be supporting such wanton destruction of an important national – and local - resource.

**29. Exempting Overtime From Taxation Raises Unfair.** I urge Congress to consider carefully the fairness issues associated with the proposal to eliminate Federal tax on overtime. The vast majority of my friends and neighbors here in the Hudson Valley work longer than a 40-hour week, but only a small minority of them receive overtime, per se. The majority includes independent contractors doing plumbing, electrical, HVAC and landscaping; people working three or even four part-time jobs as clerks at supermarkets and drugstores; and "manager-level" people (though they typically have only the lowest-level of management duties) at big box stores in the mall. They are working long hours - more than forty per week, for sure. But as none of them get overtime, I suppose that none of them would qualify for tax relief. I think that's a huge fairness issue that Congress ought to take seriously. Our tax system will only continue to function if people feel that their neighbors are getting the same deal as they are. Congress should avoid creating exceptions that create arbitrary distinctions between different groups of hard-working people. It's unfair!

**28. New ID Requirements Will Affect My Elderly Relatives, Not Me.** I'm used to having my work ID scanned whenever I enter one of my employer's buildings. It's not hard but it does affect my behavior, even though I'm used to it. I won't run out to the street vendor to grab a sandwich just before a business meeting, for fear of not being able to get back inside in time, should the card reader be on the blink. I've had a NYS Enhanced ID and a US Passport Card, both of which substitute for ReadIDs, since they first came out fifteen years ago. The upcoming requirements to show them when voting or at airport security aren't going to be a problem for me. However, they will be a problem for my elderly relatives, who no longer drive or travel or even get out of the house much. They're going to find the process of getting one overwhelming. The thing that I most worry about is one of them unexpectedly needing to travel – and I mean to a hospital or a funeral or something that is already stressful – and then suffering the indignity of being turned away from an airport. America's elderly are no less Americans than the rest of us. Congress needs to grapple with how to avoid excluding them.

**27. De-funding Top Universities is Kind of Like De-funding the Police.** The calls, five years ago, to de-fund the police and the present-day efforts to defund the universities share some common attributes. Both began after the acts of a few individuals ignited public outrage: the police encounter that led to the suffocation of a Black man in Minneapolis; and a public statement by a student association at a Massachusetts university that condoned the October 7 attack. Protests and counter-protests then caused a firestorm of anger. People found further fault in each other's pronouncements and denouncements, and began to remember hurtful incidents from their past that touched upon the present-day situation. People began to say that the Police Departments or Universities were too lax on discipline. The calls were underpinned by the real wrongs of police brutality and anti-Semitism that certainly deserve an accounting of responsibility. But in both cases, the response had been exceptionally unfocused and ostracism and punishment has been doled out without much regard to actual participation in wrongdoing. The bottom line is that police are needed to deter criminality, and professors are needed to train students in the most advanced skills. We should work to make our police departments and universities better, but de-funding them is only going to heap punishment on people who have done nothing wrong, and leave us with law enforcement and teaching vacuums that will take many years to fix.

**26. Effect of Not Taxing Tips on Social Security Payments.** I spend cash these days so infrequently! All the restaurants, and even the street vendors, take cards. Some won't even accept a twenty. Convenient for me; I go to the ATM maybe once a month, if that. But it's a shock for people working for tips. The card payments are recorded so they can no longer under-report their income and wind up paying higher taxes. I'm a salaried employee who gets an employer-issued W-2, so I can't under-report. Nevertheless, I sympathize when the taxes of low-income workers up, irrespective of the reason. Whether the waitress at the local diner pays next to no tax or none is really not going to make much difference to the Federal deficit. America might as well give people like her a break. However, whether such folk will accrue Social Security is of real concern to me. A dear friend of mine (may he rest in peace) used to brag to me about avoiding taxes. But when he finally had to stop working, he got only the most

miniscule Social Security payments. That's a problem that Congress should not compound when revising the tax code. Finally, exempting tip from taxes has to be restricted to low-earners. I don't want to start seeing on my dental bills a check-box that I can use to designate, say, 18% of my payment as a tip.

**25. Ukraine Negotiations Bewildering.** I sure hope your Foreign Affairs Committee understands the where America is heading with the Ukraine. I don't have a clue. Not that I have any need to know, mind you, but I find recent events baffling and very worrisome. Normally in a negotiation, one makes a major concession only when it is paired with one of similar gravity from one's adversary, lest one's adversary pocket the concession and go on to demand yet more. Hence, I thought America's de facto and very public recognition of Russian sovereignty over the Ukrainian land that it currently occupies, without any publicly-announced counter-concession from Russia, was an incredibly naïve move. It sends signals to one's adversary that could easily cause events to spiral out of control. That possibility scares me. It would scare me less if I thought Congress was in the loop.

**24. Effect of Tariffs on Local Auto Businesses.** Almost every town here in the Hudson Valley has a few auto dealerships and auto repair shops. They contribute to the community by providing steady, well-paying jobs to local workers and by paying real estate taxes that support schools, police and other services. How will they be affected by tariffs on cars and car parts? As tariffs come into effect, are the inventories of new cars and car parts going to dwindle? Will salespersons and mechanics start to get laid off? Will business start to get concentrated in a few big dealerships that are best positioned to pay new fees and negotiate deals with suppliers? I sure hope that Congress is thinking through these issues and will do things that will help the economies of America's towns to flourish.

**23. Will the Trade War Lead to a Prescription Drug Shortage?** I, like a lot of my friends who are middle-aged or older, am dependent on a drug regimen prescribed by my doctor. And most, if not all, of these drugs are made abroad. I know that I can adapt to the unavailability of, say, fresh Mexico-grown green peppers; I'll switch to frozen domestic green beans. I know that I can adapt to the unavailability of, say, China-made shirts; I have a box of old tee-shirts in the back of my closet that will last for years. And if I thought that my favorite brand of chocolate bar was going to become scarce, I'd stock up on them right now. But my prescriptions are beginning to worry me. I have no reserve supply; I can't stock up; and if my pharmacy stops carrying them I'll have a real scramble. I sure hope that folk in our government monitoring the situation and devising a plan to cope, but given the current disarray in HHS, I can't say I'm optimistic. I urge that Congress check that this is not a crisis in the making. Also, as our District is one with a history of pharmaceutical manufacturing, your office ought to see whether roadblocks standing in the way of those companies expanding their production can be removed.

**22. Copying A Spouse on War Reports is Ill-Advised.** America has a whole cadre of cyber-security experts working in both industry and government who are able to implement security procedures that can thwart access by our adversaries. Our top leadership needs to listen to

them. The news is full of accounts of our Nation's top leadership sharing sensitive documents with family members, low-level staffers and other unauthorized persons, either out of naiveté or a misguided sense that they somehow are exempt from espionage. Obviously, the more aware that our adversaries become of the amateurish procedures of America's top leadership, the more they will focus their efforts on intercepting their communications. Congress needs to ask hard questions of leadership and insist that the policies vetted by America's top experts in cyber-security are put into place and strictly adhered to.

**21. Can America Really Get Vital Rare Earths from Ukraine?** Flipping through the web, I came across a US Geological Survey fact sheet that tallies Rare Earth element deposits for various countries. China has oodles, as I guess everyone now knows because of all the news coverage when they stopped exporting them. Our Nation, Canada and Australia and a few other countries have some. The Ukraine has almost none, which surprised me because of our recent ongoing effort to sign a Rare Earths deal with that country. I doubt that the USGS fact sheet is wrong, for that agency employs really smart geologists. Nor does it seem to be outdated. Is our effort to sign a deal with the Ukraine misguided? I'm not personally looking for an answer, but I think that the Congress ought to be. China's shutting off access to Rare Earth elements threatens our economy. We need either to develop our own deposits (in a hurry) or sign agreements (in a hurry) with other countries who actually are capable of supplying them.

**20. Nothing Succeeds Like (Economic) Success.** Whoa! Last year's slogans envisioned us transitioning into an era of plenty. More recently, I have heard quite a few top leaders talk about belt-tightening and waiting – possibly years – for economic stimuli to have an effect. This is really a shocking change in outlook. And my own experiences are causing me growing pessimism: my grocery bills are way up; my retirement account is way down; and I'm worried about my employer going belly-up. Furthermore, everyone's talking about how prices for cars and stuff made in China will soon go through the roof. Last year's goals, as I understand them, were to increase capital investment in America (and especially in American manufacturing) and to increase American standard of living (especially by growth in employment, wages and GDP). These are all things that we know how to track with economic data. If there's no prospect of some economic policy furthering these goals, Congress should not authorize it. And if it's not working, Congress should stop authorizing it. Economic theories are fine, as far as they go. But nothing succeeds like success.

**19. Preserving the District's High-Quality Technical Jobs is Vital.** Our District has always been short on jobs with decent pay and benefits, which is why so many of us are underemployed or have to commute long distances for jobs elsewhere. Two sectors where we do have such jobs (but not enough of them) are medical and environmental. In the medical arena, we have a few medium-sized hospitals and the many smaller med tech outfits that surround them. In the environmental arena, we have the scientists and technicians at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, which is very large, and a smattering of engineering outfits which though individually small are significant in aggregate. Unfortunately, both medical and environmental jobs are threatened by the deep anticipated cuts in the Federal budget, and especially to Medicaid (in the case of the hospitals), to the National Science Foundation (in the case of

Lamont-Doherty), and to the Environmental Protection Agency (in the case of engineering consultants). Our District is definitely going to be hurt by the loss of these high-quality jobs. I urge you to find some mechanism for reducing the cuts in these two areas.

**18. No Americans in Foreign Prisons!** I think that the recently-floated idea of shipping Americans off to foreign prisons is repugnant. Even Americans who are convicted criminals have the right to be incarcerated in a facility subject to American laws, located in a place where relatives regularly are able to visit and where access to a lawyer is possible. I guess that we already have agreements in place with foreign governments (El Salvador, for instance) to accept prisoners sent from America. I urge your International Affairs committee to scrutinize the terms of these agreements. Of particular concern to me is the degree to which existing agreements can be applied to Americans and the latitude given to the foreign governments to impose additional punishments and restrict access to the incarcerated. I also urge Congress to pass a law that specifically forbids transferring incarcerated Americans abroad.

**17. Will Paying Taxes Become Voluntary?** With all the layoffs at the IRS, and the anticipated discontinuation of audits, we seem to be heading towards an era when Federal income tax will be voluntary, or nearly so. Paying taxes will be like contributing to a Church. On the one hand, the Bible says that you should give ten percent. On the other hand, very few churches receive that much; even getting one percent is considered a big success by most of them. Churches do a tremendous amount to encourage churchgoers to donate –pledge drives, stewardship luncheons, thank-you letters, etc. Governments already do a little of that, such as the roadside signs that say “your highway taxes at work”, but they are going to need to do a lot more. Actually, though, even though I pay my taxes only grudgingly and would like to pay less, I don’t think that voluntary – or nearly voluntary – income tax is a good idea. It’s the same problem as driving on a highway where speed limits are not enforced, only in reverse. If I go seventy on a road nominally marked sixty-five, then someone else will go seventy-five just to get ahead of me, and that will tempt me to go eighty (which I’d normally think is too risky, at least when I’m not driving) just to get ahead of them. You folk in Congress really need to ask hard questions of the IRS leadership, and satisfy yourselves that nearly-voluntary taxes can really work.

**16. How Will the Next Generation of Top Engineers and Scientists Get Educated?** I was always taught that America runs on innovation; that our place in the world was assured, at least in part, by engineers and scientists who are the best in the world and focused on innovation. They create the miracle drugs, super-strong materials, smarter electronics, faster communication, more accurate prediction methods that underpin the growth of our economy. Is this suddenly no longer true? With the proposed elimination of the federal agencies that fund science and engineering traineeships, how is the next generation of top engineers and scientists going to be educated? Congress needs to ask whether that's even possible when the science agencies no longer exist. America needs a plan that ensures the education of the next generation of top scientists and engineers. America should not throw away the current system unless something demonstrably better is developed to replace it.

**15. Congress Needs to Ask Hard Questions Before Defunding NATO.** It's been widely reported that NATO will be defunded in the next Federal budget. I guess that falls a little short of withdrawing from the alliance, but without any money allocated for the purpose, we won't exactly be participating either. I really think that Congress needs to ask hard questions about why we would want to do this. In addition to the military side of things, NATO has served to bring the foreign affairs of the US and Europe together in a way that reinforces American influence and importance. Unilaterally throwing all that away without having a clearly stated reason, as well as a plan for what comes next, seems to me to be folly. If you think it's something our Nation needs to do, I really urge you to explain to us why. As things stand, I don't see it.

**14. Congressional Oversight Needed on Foreign Prison Deals.** The more I hear about our use of the El Salvadoran prison, the more it disturbs me. The argument that was made yesterday is that because it's foreign, courts don't have jurisdiction. We can send some random dude there in what everyone concedes was a mistake, and the courts can't compel his return. What especially bothers me is there seems to be nothing that limits this argument to non-citizens. If my mother (a citizen) mistakenly had gotten sent there, would she be beyond the reach of the courts, too? Would I even be able to find out that's where she was? I think we need some clear ground-rules on how this type of imprisonment should work. Congress needs to demand that clear rules be worked out. And those rules need to say that you fix mistakes.

**13. Weather Scientists Performing Useful Service.** I know it's before your time, but back in the Sixties when I was in High School, weather forecasting was a joke. You could never trust the predictions, even for the next day. I mostly ignored them. But because of the weather scientists, they gradually improved. I knew better than ignore them in 2012, when Superstorm Sandy was predicted. Had I not evacuated my elderly mother from her coastal Long Island home, she would have drowned. So, I am shocked that the proposed budget calls for eliminating all the weather scientists. It seems weirdly counterproductive; we're shooting ourselves in the feet. How are people going to prepare for tornados and hurricanes and heavy storms? I don't want predictions to gradually worsen till we're back to 1960's quality. Why throw away all the real progress? Please don't fire them all.

**12. Civilian Influencing Firing of Head of Cyber Command.** I heard that the head of the United States Cyber Command was fired on the advice of a person who, although an internet personality, has no official position in our Country's government. I have to admit that I find that deeply troubling. I don't suppose that the person involved has a security clearance or has been subject to the sort of detailed background check that would turn up problems. How can we be confident that such a person isn't acting under the direction of one of our adversaries, or being unknowingly manipulated by them? Is this something that the Congress had advanced notice of? I really think that the committees, like your Foreign Affairs Committee, need to be asking hard questions.

**11. Big Shoe Factory in Haverstraw or Peekskill?** I understand that the purpose of the huge recently-announced tariffs is to bring manufacturing back to America. With China socked with a fifty-percent-plus rate, they're going to be at a big disadvantage in the shoe market. A big, sparkling, modern shoe factory in Haverstraw or Peekskill could really make a dent in the unemployment in those towns. And it will be a reliable business, for everyone regularly needs new shoes. Congress should start thinking about how reindustrialization could be facilitated, and your office in particular should have a plan to make sure our District gets its fair share. I'm sure that the Representatives for old New England shoe towns like Lewiston, Maine will be scrambling for the investment. We can't let them go unchallenged, for we in New York have so much underutilized talent that needs to be put to work.

**10. Tariffs and Travel Safety.** The big tariffs are about bringing manufacturing jobs back to America. I get that. But they've sure made the rest of the world mad at us. Is it still going to be safe to travel to Europe? That worries me. I doubt we'll limit this new trade war to just trade. Are there going to be other forms of violence? The big tariffs must have all sorts of ramifications besides travel that I can't even imagine. Military and intelligence cooperation tracking down criminals, for sure. What else, I don't know. I sure hope that the Congress is tracking the situation. Though I can't fathom all the details, it's obvious that this is really a big deal and Congress needs to be on top of it.

**9. Uncomfortable with Greenland annexation.** I am very uncomfortable with this sudden talk about annexing Greenland. What would we do with the people who live there? Send them to Denmark? Give them US citizenship? Create a reservation like the Navajo's or Pequot's? Just thinking about it troubles me. But more importantly, what does the Congress think about it? Have the right committees discussed the possibility? Is there any sort of long term plan?

**8. Medical Researchers Needed to Find New Cures.** I was dismayed to learn yesterday that yet another of my friends/relatives has gone on disability due to long covid - a woman in her thirties. That brings the total up to four, which seems awfully high to me. It's not something we as a society should be shrugging off. Notwithstanding the growing skepticism over scientific medicine, and the cuts to NIH and CDC, this really does seem to be a problem. It's destroying the dreams of a lot of Americans. We really need to have medical researchers working on a cure.

**7. Congressional Scrutiny of Sensitive Communications Needed.** I'm sure that our Government has computer specialists who really understand how secure communications work. So I was shocked by the naive mistake that was recently made of high-level military plans being discussed using a commercial app on a commercial cell phone (which every knows has a multitude of vulnerabilities), and the conversation being shared inadvertently with a news reporter. It must mean that the advice of the specialists is being ignored. Congress really needs to be asking tough questions about how future mistakes can be prevented. One has only to look at recent hacks, including the billion dollar ByBit heist, to realize that our adversaries are



willing and able to go to incredible lengths to attack us electronically to steal invaluable information.

**6. Defense Logistics Agency Layoffs Counterproductive.** I vividly recall watching the 1965 movie, *Battle of the Bulge*, with my parents in a drive-in theatre and being impressed by the German Panzer tanks being defeated, not by the prowess of the Allied Shermans, but simply by running out of fuel. I later learned that this fictionalized account accurately depicted the situation. Not only were the Germans low on fuel, but the Allies were aware of the low stocks and specifically targeted fuel depots. I therefore find ironic that the first layoff in the Department of Defense were to the supply experts in the Defense Logistics Agencies. The DoD focus on Warrior Soldiers and Warrior Sailors will not increase the capability of our Armed Forces to deter our adversaries if our ships and planes are low on fuel, or disabled due to lack of maintenance. I urge Congress to ask hard questions of the DoD leadership about the overall plan to maintain a high level of readiness

**5. Who's first under the Golden Dome?** The recently announced plan to cover the whole US with a "Golden Dome" anti-missile defense is intriguing, especially in light of the successful thwarting of the two attacks on Israel last year. I suppose that the Dome will be implemented in stages, for it will no doubt be expensive, and even when it's complete it will protect some areas better than others. But who will be protected first and best? I suppose that many conflicting priorities will be put forward: the big population centers and especially those like NYC and DC that have already come under attack; strategically important manufacturing centers like Silicon Valley; big military bases like Pearl and Bragg; the nuclear missile silos in Wyoming, North Dakota and Montana; infrastructure like Texas oil refineries. Congress needs to demand of the DoD leadership a well-thought through implementation plan that looks at the trade-offs, and Congress needs to be part of the process that decides who gets protected first and best.

**4. What is Our Military Recruitment Plan?** The Secretary of Defense has been emphasizing our need for Warriors. OK, I get that. We don't want anyone who is not a Warrior or has little prospect of becoming a Warrior. No women. No homosexuals. No transvestites. I'm not sure where DoD stands with Blacks. Trouble is, I don't see any clear articulation of who we want and how we're going to entice them to enlist. If I thought of myself as a Young Warrior (but I'm definitely not young), I'd be sitting on the sidelines waiting for a clear message. And given that DoD needs to recruit something like a quarter million Soldier Warriors and Sailor Warriors each year, that's likely to be problematical. Does DoD have a vision? Do we now want (male, straight) Black Sash recipients? Or (male straight) college wrestlers. Or professional football players? Congress really needs to start asking hard questions of the DoD leadership to ensure there's a viable plan. Else we likely to have a recruitment crisis in our Armed Forces.

**3. Warrior Soldiers and Sailors Need Rigorous Rules of Engagement.** I was just starting high school back in 1968, when the investigations surrounding the My Lai massacre became public. About the half of my friends and neighbors, and especially many World War Two vets, refused

to believe that Army soldiers would massacre hundreds of civilians and thought that it was all Commie propaganda. The other half acknowledged the tragedy and ascribed it to the fog of war; scared soldiers shooting whatever moved because they couldn't distinguish friend from foe. And a few pacifists and hippies shouted I-told-you-so. Absolutely nobody thought that the massacre epitomized the virtues of the Warrior Soldier or felt that America's war fighting ability would be improved by such events happening routinely. I consider the current efforts of the Department of Defense leadership to loosen the rules of engagement and reduce the role of the Judge Advocate General in investigating war crimes misguided. I urge the Congress to ask hard questions of the DoD leadership on how these changes will advance the effectiveness of Americas' armed forces.

**2. Defense Implications of an Ice Free Northwest Passage.** I understand from what its Secretary said that the Department of Defense does not do climate change crap anymore. Irrespective of that, however, I want to point out that the issue of whether the Northwest Passage is ice free this summer - or next summer, or the summers that follow - is a significant one that has defense implications. Ice free waters mean that our adversaries' navies can operate more easily, which requires us to be more watchful and divert intelligence resources that otherwise might be better deployed in the world's trouble spots. And should the Arctic become ice-free on the typical summer (and I know that by positing change I'm treading troubled water), more Arctic-specific training might be necessary for our Warrior Soldiers and Sailors to successfully carry out their missions. To my mind, these are sound reasons for the DoD to retain its access to top expertise in Arctic oceanography and meteorology. I urge Congress to ask hard questions of the DoD leadership on how the conditions of the world's oceans (including the Arctic) will continue to be monitored and predicted, and the defense implications that arise, mitigated.

**1. Firing of Nuclear Bomb Personnel Amateurish.** The termination of the technical people from the National Nuclear Security Administration by DOGE (or whatever agency gave the order) really came across as amateurish. I was surprised such a mistake was made, because I remember that back in 2016, during Rick Perry's confirmation hearings in the Senate, the fact that NNSA was part of DOE was widely reported in the press, as part of the debate over whether an oil company executive like Mr. Perry had enough military knowledge to oversee the Nation's nuclear deterrent. I think that this sort of uninformed termination of people performing incredibly important and sensitive work is really amateurish. Furthermore, it gives an advantage to our adversaries, who will profit by the inevitable delays that replacing or rehiring these people will cause, or even worse, try to trick unemployed people into divulging sensitive information. Congress really needs to ask hard questions about how this termination decision was made.